KU LEUVEN

HIVA

RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND SOCIETY

EPRC ECONOMIC POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

30 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

DECENT WORK ASSESSMENT OF THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN UGANDA

Synthesis report of findings in 4 districts

REPORT

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Highlights

- **Relatively high labour market security**: The hospitality sector in Uganda shows a relatively strong labour market security, with minimal structural unemployment and irregular work, though training opportunities remain limited and workers are not sure whether they would find another job with similar or better working conditions.
- **Income and social protection are major challenges**: Income security is low, with workers earning significantly below a living wage and receiving minimal overtime pay. Social protection scores the weakest, with, amongst others, limited access to health insurance, paid sick leave, and pension benefits.
- **Employment contracts and job security issues**: Many workers lack written contracts, increasing job insecurity. This issue is more severe among lower-level employees, who fear dismissal without clear reasons.
- **Long working hours and poor work-life balance**: Workers often endure long shifts, sometimes exceeding 12-14 hours per day, with minimal rest, low wages, and little time for family, significantly affecting well-being.
- **Fair treatment amidst workplace harassment**: While fair treatment scores relatively high, issues of harassment, discrimination, and verbal abuse—especially towards women—are still prevalent in many workplaces

The content of this report is the responsibility of the researchers and does not necessarily reflect the official position of Enabel.

The pictures in this report portray random workplaces in the hospitality sector in Uganda.

1 Background of study

This synthesis report provides the main findings of a decent work assessment, executed in the hospitality sector in the Rwenzori/Albertine regions in Uganda. The data-collection took place in April-May 2024 and involved interviews with 95 workers and 16 employers. The full research report will be made available on the Decent Work Toolbox website.

The decent work assessment was executed in the context of the Regional Collaborative Action Research (Box 1) with the aim of supporting the interventions of the Belgian development agency Enabel in the area of social protection and decent work. Enabel is implementing a 5-year portfolio with interventions related to the four pillars of decent work to support vulnerable populations in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Special attention is given to formalizing informal work and gender mainstreaming.

In Uganda, the target sectors of the RCARI project are hospitality and agriculture (coffee and cocoa). Enabel supports the hospitality sector by addressing skill gaps and promoting youth employment in sustainable tourism. The intervention also focuses on the strengthening of working conditions in the sector, in collaboration with the sector federation. Through this approach, Enabel aims to enhance responsible tourism practices that benefit both local communities and the broader economy.

BOX 1 - REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH (RCARI)

RCARI is the research component of the Thematic Portfolio Social Protection and Decent Work (TPSP) in Central Africa 2022-2026, initiated by Enabel in Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC. RCARI is geared towards supporting these interventions and related policy environment by providing evidence-based support and facilitating regional research collaboration in a range of topics related to social protection and decent work. Three national research institutes have been selected to partner with HIVA and the Enabel country teams. These institutes[1] are Chaire de Dynamique Social (CDS) for the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) for Rwanda, and Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) for Uganda. Their expertise can help ensure that the studies accurately reflect the needs and perspectives of local scholars and communities, leading to more effective policy recommendations and program interventions. The research comprises several studies with an action-research component. Moreover, decent work assessments in various sectors are carried out using a standardized research protocol, developed and tested by HIVA-KU Leuven, to monitor and evaluate impact among workers and stimulate social dialogue.

[1] Other institutes and consultancy bureaus are involved in ad-hoc assignments of the RCARI programme.

2 Methodology

2.1 Decent work assessment methodology

The decent work assessment tool (Box 2), developed by HIVA-KU Leuven, is inspired by different analytical frameworks and surveys, including ILO surveys on decent work, the European Working Conditions survey, social auditing tools, and the DecentWorkCheck.org. More information about the instrument can be found on the Decent Work Toolbox website. In this study the focus has been on employees and employers in the hospitality sector in Uganda.

BOX 2 - DECENT WORK ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT (DWA)

The DWA tool comprises of three different surveys at worker level, respectively for employees in informal and formal employment, self-employed and smallholder farmers. Separate semi-structured questionnaires are available for employers and worker representatives. The worker-part of the decent work assessment instrument starts with **a narrative-based component**, which invites workers and smallholder farmers to share a story about their work. This narrative-based approach involves the capture and analysis of many short stories to understand and respond to complex issues. At the core of the instrument is a decent work quick scan, comprising of 55 to 60 closed questions (depending on the type of workers), covering eight dimensions of decent work: **employment security | labour market security | income security | social protection | work-life balance and well-being | fair treatment | occupational health and safety |** and **voice and representation**. Each of the eight dimensions of decent work consists of a limited number of closed questions. The scores can be converted to a number between 0 and 10, with 0 the weakest score, and 10 the highest score to allow for the aggregation of scores for each of the eight domains.

2.2 Sample and location

The hospitality sector employs individuals across various occupations, each playing a critical role in delivering services related to accommodation, food and beverages, entertainment and recreation, and travel services. These include cashiers, who manage financial transactions, and cooks and kitchen aids, who craft culinary experiences; housekeepers to ensure cleanliness and comfort; receptionists to welcome guests and assist them throughout their stay; waiters and waitresses, and bar attendants for serving guests; supervisors and managers who oversee operations and ensure that staff and customers are well cared for; and security guards who safeguard the premises. While hospitality can be considered a subsector of the tourism sector, not all hospitality services are directly linked to it. Hospitality establishments, like local restaurants or urban hotels, may also cater to non-tourists (e.g., business travelers or local residents).

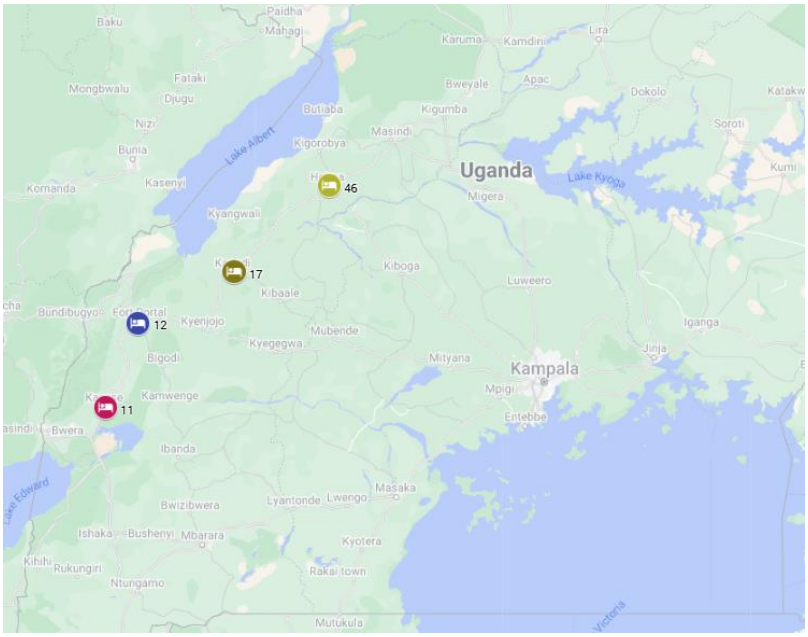
Table 2.1 provides the sample size for employees, differentiated between gender, as well as a categorized for three broad job categories. In addition, interviews were held with 16 employers.

TABLE 2.1 Sample size for employees in the hospitality sector

	Employees
Gender - total	**95**
Female	58
Male	28
Not recorded	9
Job position - total	**95**
Worker	67
Middle management	22
Senior management	6

Source: Authors' construction based on primary data, 2024

FIGURE 2.1 No of employees per district (Hoima: 46; Kabarole: 12; Kagadi: 17; Kasese: 11)



2.3 Main limitations

- While providing a rich picture of the working conditions in the sector, the overall sample size is too small to derive at a fully representative findings of the situation on the ground.
- Moreover, due to a number of practical considerations in the sampling (which was done through the sector federations, and informed by the scope of the Enabel interventions), there could be a bias in the companies of the hospitality sector that participated.
- The scores of the decent work scan represent the views of workers on their decent work situation. The actual scores can be influenced by a lack of knowledge about their rights. Moreover, while the interviewers were attempting to build trust and create a safe space, we cannot exclude that some workers might have felt some fear for speaking out freely, or felt somehow pushed to answer in a socially desirable way. This is especially the case for more sensitive topics, such as around discrimination, child labour, and worker representation.

3 Key facts about the hospitality sector in Uganda

Hospitality, as part of the tourism sector, has become increasingly important for Uganda's economy, contributing significantly to both foreign exchange earnings and job creation. In 2021, employment in hotels, restaurants, and eating places, represented around 7% of total employment in Uganda[2], particularly women and low-skilled youth. At the same time, the sector is known to have structural challenges in the area of decent work. More than 60% of its workers, for example, are in informal employment, there are long working hours and wages tend to be low[3].

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis severely impacted this sector, exacerbating existing challenges like low wages, long working hours, and gender-based discrimination[4]. With the sector poised for recovery and growth, particularly in areas such as hotels, restaurants, and hospitality services, addressing these decent work deficits is vital to ensure equitable and sustainable growth, especially in tourism-rich regions like Albertine and Rwenzori.

[2] Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Dissemination of National Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2021* Thematic Reports.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Annual Migration and Tourism Report 2021*.

4 Main findings

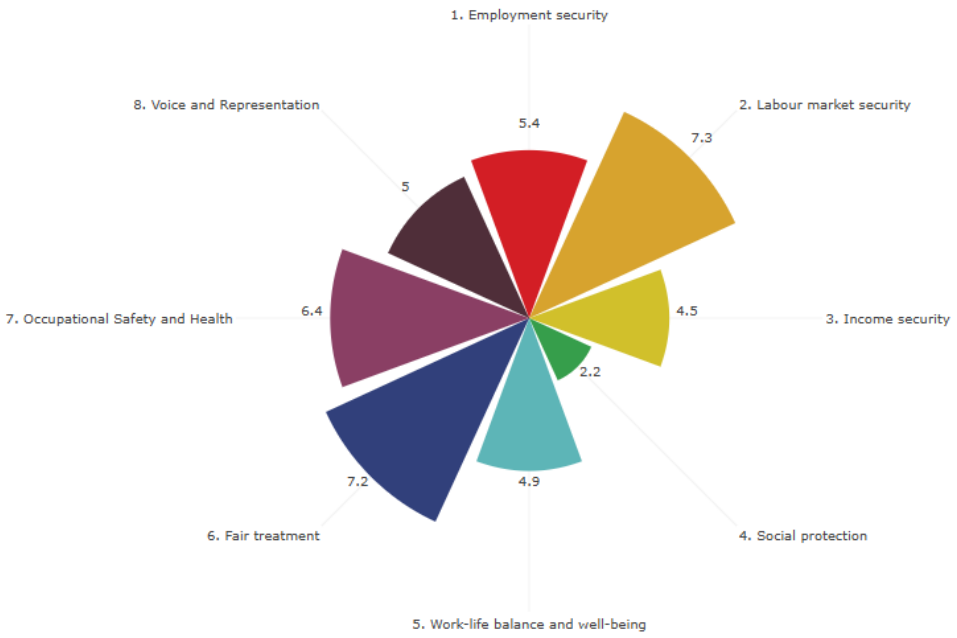
4.1 Overall picture

Figure 1 provides the overall picture of the decent work scan in eight domains of decent work for all the respondents together. From this picture, the following observations can be made:

- Highest scores can be found for the domains of labour market security (7.3), fair treatment (7.2) and occupational safety and health (6.4)
- The lowest scores are for social protection (2.2) and to a lesser extent income security (4.5), work-life balance and well-being (4.9), voice and representation (5) and employment security (5.4).

A more fine-grained analysis is provided for each of the eight domains in the following sections.

Figure 1 Aggregated scores in eight domains of decent work on a scale from 0 to 10 (N=95)



Source: own data and calculations

Table 1 shows substantial differences in the scores[5] between workers versus employees at managerial positions, especially in the areas of employment security, income security, and social protection

[5] The aggregated scores can hide larger differences between groups of employees for individual questions, which could be balanced out at the aggregated level.

TABLE 1 Scores for different groups of employees (N=95, 0=lowest score, 10=most positive score)

	Workers	Middle management	Senior management
1. Employment security	5.3	5.1	7.6
2. Labour market security	7.2	7.3	8.2
3. Income security	3.9	6.2	5.1
4. Social protection	1.6	3.7	3.6
5. Work life balance and well-being	4.7	5.5	5.1
6. Fair treatment	7.1	7.2	7.8
7. Occupational safety & health	6.4	6.3	6.9
8. Voice and representation	4.7	5.8	6.2

Source: own data and calculations

4.2 Employment security

The rather weak aggregated score for employment security (5.4) can be explained by two main areas of concern. Firstly, the absence of written contracts (2.2), an important aspect of employment security, is a structural problem in the hospitality sector. The problem is larger for employees in lower positions, compared to those in managerial positions. This is also reflected in the responses to the question on the fear of losing your job, which is scored on average rather negatively (4.3).

Interestingly, this insecurity is not reflected in the questions about unfair dismissal, which receive quite positive scores. Looking more closely in the situation of sub-groups shows that workers on a part-time contract or workers that are employed through a labour broker, feel that they can be more easily dismissed without a clear reason.

"If you are good and hardworking, it's easy to get and enjoy this job and if you're disobedient and disrespectful, you can easily get dismissed." (worker in hospitality)

"In case of a mistake, we get corrected and we get warned and receive a short notice before being chased. They can tell you to go home that they will call you, that's when you know that you have been fired." (worker in hospitality)

Figure 2**: Employment security** (N=95, 0=lowest score, 10=most positive score)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Employment security'
5.4
Are you employed on the basis of a written contract or agreement?
2.2
Can you be dismissed without a clear reason for dismissal?
7.4
Unless there is a fault of yours, could you be dismissed by your employer without advance notice?
7.7
How much do you fear losing your job? (fear being out of work)
4.3

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

4.3 Labour market security

Labour market security scores the highest (7.2) of the eight domains. Workers report few problems with structural unemployment, under employment, or the irregularity of work. Section 4.6 will show that this sector has problems with excessive working hours and very limited holidays. The overall appreciation of the easiness to find a similar or better job, however, scores rather weak (4.5), the same is true for the participation to on the job training (4.4). Some workers do refer to opportunities to learn and grow in the job.

" By the time I started working here, I began as a gardener and later promoted to a cleaner and now I work a sauna attendant. I'm performing well, I get trained and I also train others. (worker in hospitality)

“I have a good job with a lot of freedom…. I have taken 3 years so far and promoted to receptionist having started from house cleaning." (worker in hospitality)

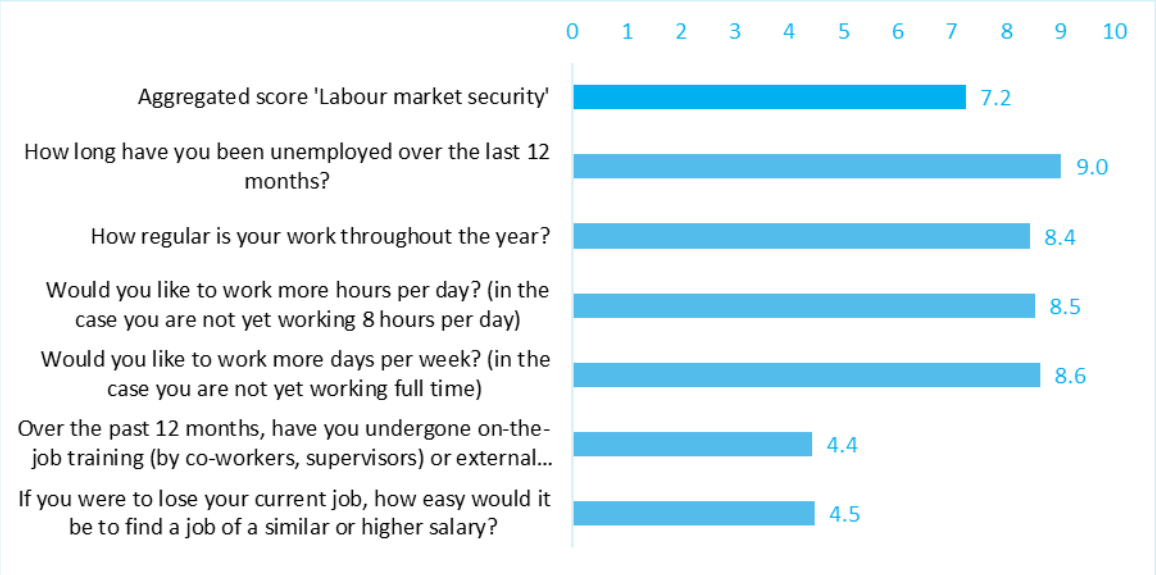
" Our bosses give us chances to learn new things eg IT skills , exposed to different departments and sometimes we get business trips to learn and train and they get us more skills beyond one department.." (worker in hospitality)

Although for others, the experience is more negative:

" Here, you just work without anyone asking if you want to improve your skills." (worker in hospitality)

There are no opportunities for training or growth, and we just do what we are told without being given the chance to learn new things. (worker in hospitality)

Figure 3: **Labour market security** (N=95, 0=lowest score, 10=most positive score)

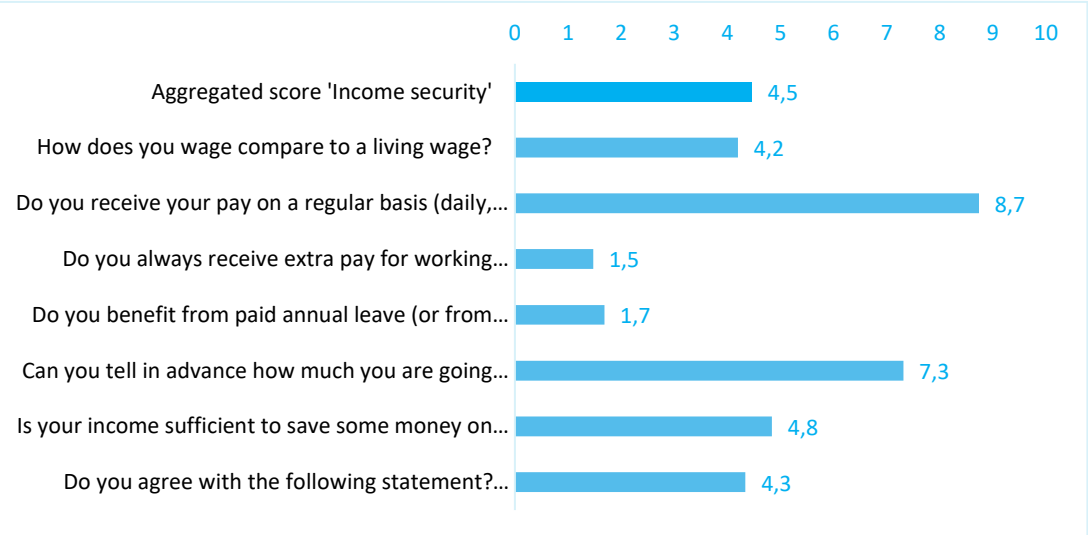

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Labour market security'
7.2
How long have you been unemployed over the last 12 months?
9.0
How regular is your work throughout the year?
8.4
Would you like to work more hours per day? (in the case you are not yet working 8 hours per day)
8.5
Would you like to work more days per week? (in the case you are not yet working full time)
8.6
Over the past 12 months, have you undergone on-the-job training (by co-workers, supervisors) or external...
4.4
If you were to lose your current job, how easy would it be to find a job of a similar or higher salary?
4.5

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

4.4 Income security

Income security has an aggregated score of 4.5, which signals challenges in various domains. The distance between the actual income and a living wage, is the most important sub-dimension of income security, and counts for 50% in the aggregated score (adjusted weighing). The distance with a living wage remains substantial in the sector. For a worker, the average wage is found to be less than a third (31%) of a living wage, while for managerial positions (middle and senior level) it is estimated at around 70% of a living wage. There is a significant pay gap between women, whose wages represent 27% of a living wage and male workers, which find themselves at 42%.

Figure 4: **Income security** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)


0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Income security'
4,5
How does you wage compare to a living wage?
4,2
Do you receive your pay on a regular basis (daily,...
8,7
Do you always receive extra pay for working...
1,5
Do you benefit from paid annual leave (or from...
1,7
Can you tell in advance how much you are going...
7,3
Is your income sufficient to save some money on...
4,8
Do you agree with the following statement?...
4,3

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

Aside from the wages, the weakest areas for income security are paid annual leave (1.7) and receiving extra pay for working overtime (1.5). The latter is illustrated in many stories of workers.

“…I started working here three years ago. Some of the benefits I have received is gaining different skills like bar service, customer care. Working extra hours is a challenge here because they are not paid for.” (worker in hospitality)

"No extra payments for overtime, no day off, I work through more than 8 hours." (worker in hospitality)

“The working hours are not favourable because sometimes we work extra hours though not compensated as extra time but we get our salary paid promptly.” (worker in hospitality)

"I am a chef with a certificate in catering. I work for a week straight, no extra payments for overtime, no day off, I work through more than 8 hours, I work from 6 am up to midnight if clients are many." (worker in hospitality)

" Working overtime and night shifts are not considered here, I came expecting to work for 8 hours, but I usually end up working for 14 hours as clients keep coming in and out, yet am the only chef available.." (worker in hospitality)

"Sometimes I leave at 10 pm though the overtime is not paid." (worker in hospitality)

The overall rather negative perceptions about being paid appropriately (4.3) is in line with the previous findings. Higher scores can be found for the regularity (8.7) and the predictability (7.3) of the income.

4.5 Social protection

With an average aggregated score of 2.2, social protection is by far the weakest dimension in this sector. All aspects of social protection are lacking; including access to health care, paid sick leave, pension, invalidity benefit, etc. The situation is slightly better for employees in managerial positions, but even there, not all sub-dimensions of social protection are covered. This issue is also reported extensively in the stories:

“Even when I get sick, my fellow staff members usually raise money for me to cater for my medication, since we don't have an official insurance scheme." (worker in hospitality)

"We do not have a health insurance and luckily enough I hardly fall sick." (worker in hospitality)

"Whenever I get ill, I use my own money, I do not have a health insurance." (worker in hospitality)

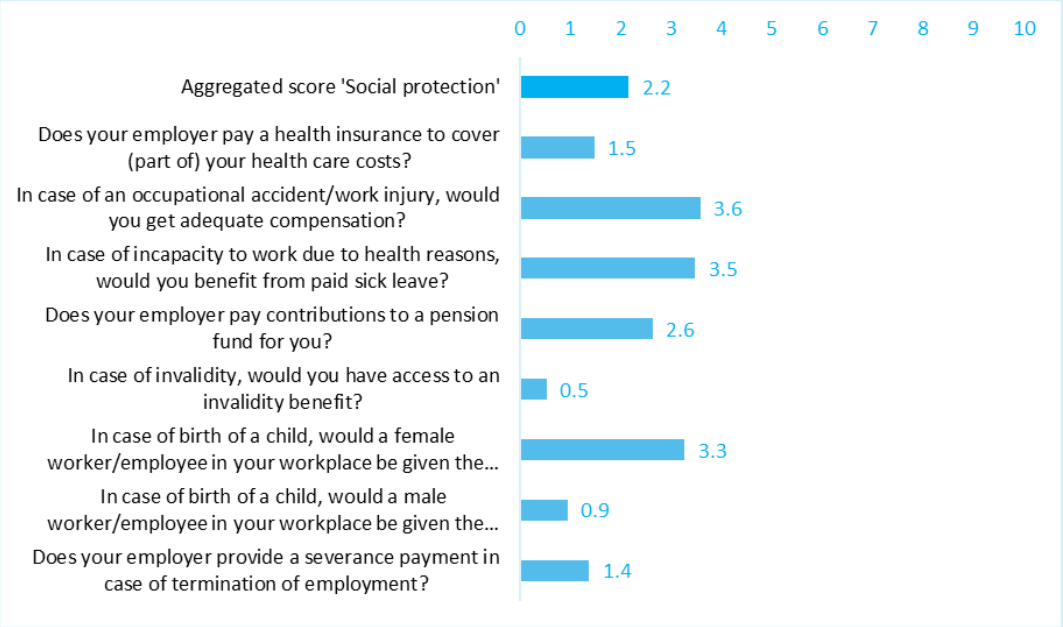
"They don't pay for us any insurance when you fall sick it's upon you to treat yourself therefore can't recommend someone to begin suffering the way I have suffered." (worker in hospitality)

“When you fall sick and you don't come to work that day is deducted from your salary of 100,000 shillings” (worker in hospitality)

"Here when you fall sick you treat yourself and when you don't have money and you ask from the boss he doesn't respond." (worker in hospitality)

"No one cares where I work, everyone is on their own even if I am absent and sick no one bothers to know what is wrong with me." (worker in hospitality)

Figure 5: **Social protection** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)


0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Social protection'
2.2
Does your employer pay a health insurance to cover (part of) your health care costs?
1.5
In case of an occupational accident/work injury, would you get adequate compensation?
3.6
In case of incapacity to work due to health reasons, would you benefit from paid sick leave?
3.5
Does your employer pay contributions to a pension fund for you?
2.6
In case of invalidity, would you have access to an invalidity benefit?
0.5
In case of birth of a child, would a female worker/employee in your workplace be given the...
3.3
In case of birth of a child, would a male worker/employee in your workplace be given the...
0.9
Does your employer provide a severance payment in case of termination of employment?
1.4

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data,2024

While not providing structural access to healthcare, some employers do cover some of the costs when employees fall sick, some provide paid sick leave, or other forms of compensation.

“..when we are sick we are taken for medication. “ (worker in hospitality)

“for example when you fall sick they pay part of the hospital bills, when you lose someone they give some condolences pay” (worker in hospitality)

“When I'm sick, the hotel pays my entire hospital bill. In case of loss of close relative like father, mother, brother or child, the hotel provides condolences and gives you a week off. (worker in hospitality)

4.6 Work-life balance & well-being

With an aggregated score of 4.9, this dimension scores moderate to weak. This dimension covers nine[6] different aspects, with the lowest scores for excessive hours per week (2.6), feeling of

[6] The question about the hours of work during the peak season was not part of the survey in the hospitality sector

exhaustiveness (3.4), and areas related to well-being, such as autonomy (4.5), and lack of consultation by superiors (3.1). However, there are many references to excessive hours at work in this sector:

"I work as a waitress. I report for work at 8.30am and retire at 10pm. When there's live band, sometimes I retire at 1 am. In this case, ……. Its fine for me to go home at 1am except when it rains and its so muddy outside. I don't really feel safe going home at 1 am because of uncertainties along the way." (worker in hospitality)

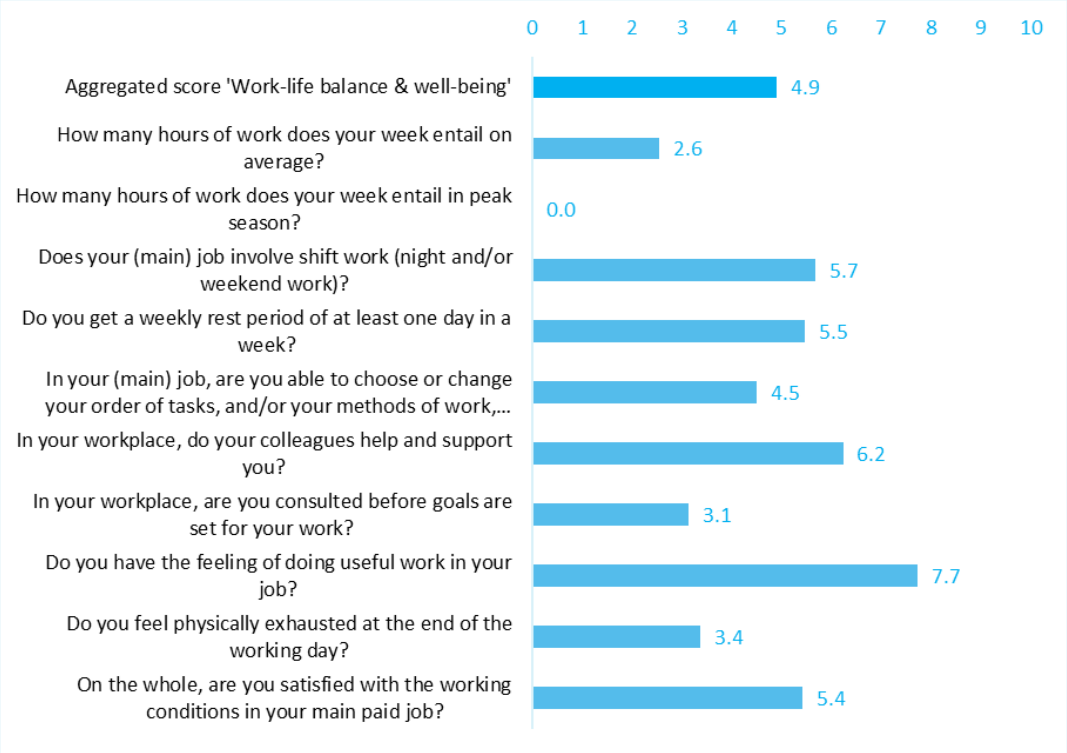
" I work for very long hour usually 13 to 15 hours a day so it's exhausting." (worker in hospitality)

" I work from 6am upto midnight if clients are many (worker in hospitality)

" I believe we are highly demotivated because of low pay, delayed payments, working hard and extra working time with no shifts. I am a single mother and balancing time for family also becomes hard.." (worker in hospitality)

Other areas score slightly better, such as the support received from colleagues (6.2), a weakly rest day (5.5). The overall satisfaction with the working conditions is on the low side (5.4), while most employees do have the feeling of doing useful work (7.7).

Figure 6: **Work-life balance and well-being** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)


0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Work-life balance & well-being'
4.9
How many hours of work does your week entail on average?
2.6
How many hours of work does your week entail in peak season?
0.0
Does your (main) job involve shift work (night and/or weekend work)?
5.7
Do you get a weekly rest period of at least one day in a week?
5.5
In your (main) job, are you able to choose or change your order of tasks, and/or your methods of work,...
4.5
In your workplace, do your colleagues help and support you?
6.2
In your workplace, are you consulted before goals are set for your work?
3.1
Do you have the feeling of doing useful work in your job?
7.7
Do you feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day?
3.4
On the whole, are you satisfied with the working conditions in your main paid job?
5.4

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

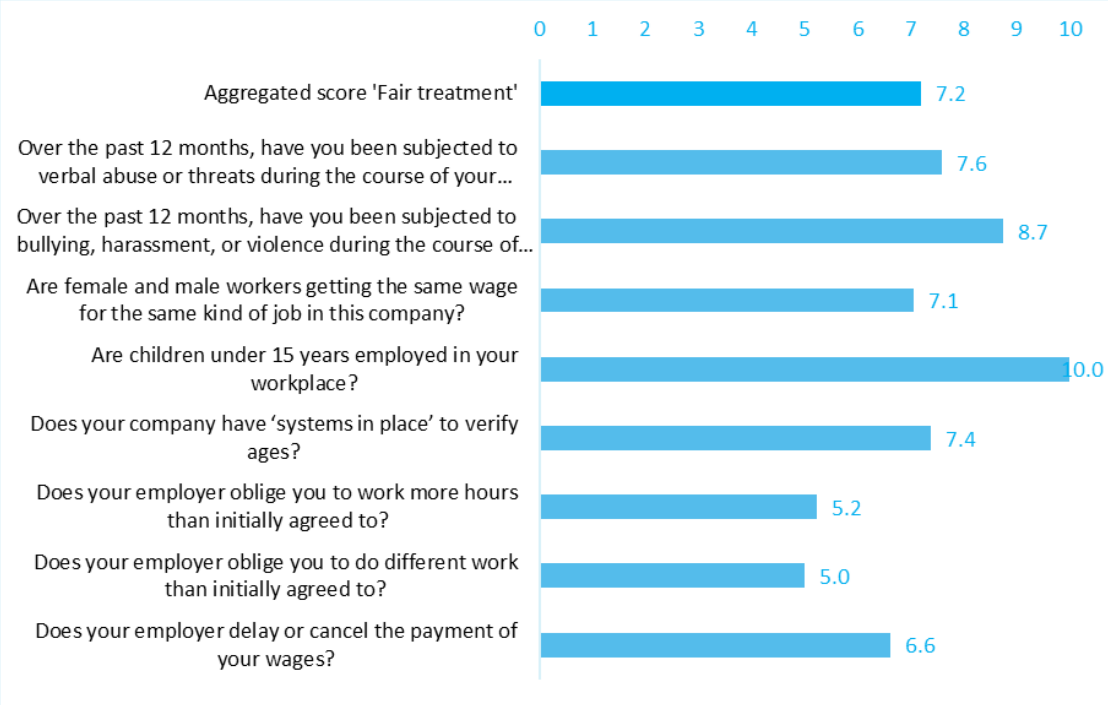
4.7 Fair treatment

Fair treatment receives a relatively high score (7.2) from the workers. Relatively few workers in our sample report incidences of verbal abuse, threats, bullying, harassment, or violence over the past 12 months. Indeed, several workers confirmed this in the stories:

"the boss treats us well and listens to our concerns. He is social and provides a good environment for me and always stands up to rude clients on our behalf". (worker in hospitality)

"The job has not been bad and the conditions of our work are fair as well as the manager's behaviour is good. He handles us in a humane way. (worker in hospitality)

Figure 7: **Fair treatment** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)


0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Fair treatment'
7.2
Over the past 12 months, have you been subjected to verbal abuse or threats during the course of your...
7.6
Over the past 12 months, have you been subjected to bullying, harassment, or violence during the course of...
8.7
Are female and male workers getting the same wage for the same kind of job in this company?
7.1
Are children under 15 years employed in your workplace?
10.0
Does your company have 'systems in place' to verify ages?
7.4
Does your employer oblige you to work more hours than initially agreed to?
5.2
Does your employer oblige you to do different work than initially agreed to?
5.0
Does your employer delay or cancel the payment of your wages?
6.6

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

However, to some extent contrary to the image emerging from the scores, many incidents are reported in the stories, which might be an indication that quite some workers assume this type of problematic behaviour is somehow part of the job.

"An incident I remember when I had just joined the hotel I client pushed me and slapped me infront of my boss. I thought my boss was going to side with the client but he was on my side and told the client to check out." (worker in hospitality)

"The challenge we as waitress is that customers don't respect i and my colleagues, they look at me as a prostitute and they abuse me. They feel I should sleep with them

and you report our bosses listen to the customers more than us." (worker in hospitality)

" incase anything goes missing, we all have to pay it that is the house keeper whether you worker from the upper side or the lower side. ." (worker in hospitality)

" Sometimes clients become hard to handle , and some do not want to pay and follow rules this makes work hard because at the end blame comes to you. So at the end if a client doesn't pay for his room, the fee will be deducted from my salary.." (worker in hospitality)

" Sometime the manager is also rude to us he quarrels alot but when he remembers that we are also his fellow workers then he adjusts and stops." (worker in hospitality)

" Our boss is also too tough for life you can't even approach him.." (worker in hospitality)

" If you are a waitress, it's not easy. You need to be patient with some clients because sometimes you can meet one who is stubborn and demands sex from you." (worker in hospitality)

"…some customers get drank and become rude since I work in a bar section." (worker in hospitality)

Respondents report that the employment of children below the age of 15 is non-existent in the hospitality sectors in the Rwenzori and Albertine regions. However, this may be underreported since only a few firms have systems in place to verify ages, implying a lack of mechanisms to prevent the employment of underage workers unknowingly.

Another problematic area relates to aspects of forced labour, where a substantial number of workers have been exposed to situations where they are expected to do more hours than agreed to, they had to different work than agreed to, or there were problems with the timing or cancellation of their wages.

"…However, we are overwhelmed with work. We start at 5am and finish at around 10 pm. We have no breaks. The boss always barks at us and uses abusive language. The other problem is working for long hours with out rest since the place has so many customers." (worker in hospitality)

"…The working hours are not favourable because sometimes we work extra hours though not compensated as extra time but we get our salary paid promptly" (worker in hospitality)

"The salary is still low and they haven't increased as they promised to and some times the money takes long to be paid to about a month and 2 weeks." (worker in hospitality)

4.8 Occupational safety and health

This dimension scores reasonably high (6.4), although there are areas of attention. There might be some ignorance amongst the workers about some of the occupational safety and health risks. A large majority (9.3) of the workers report having consistent access to clean water, nutritious food, and sanitary toilet facilities at their workplace. One respondent noted that

"…we are also given good meals which are balanced.". (worker in hospitality)

However, others have less positive experiences with the food and the accommodation provided on site:

"Our diet is like that of students, I eat posho and beans every day at work. There is no change in diet." (worker in hospitality)

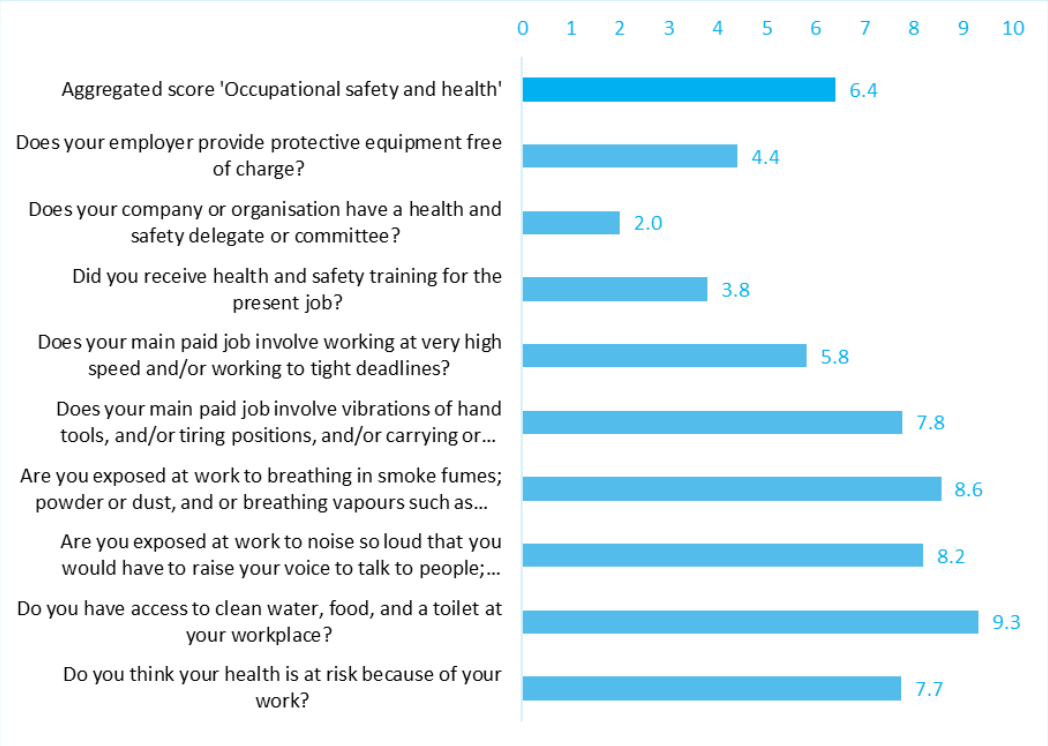
"However, the feeding of employees is poor, we eat posho and beans from Monday to Saturday and we are meant to change on Sunday but sometimes we don't change." (worker in hospitality)

"I can't recommend someone here or for this position. Because I have bad accommodation we almost sleep on the floor. We are fed poorly and also our salaries delay alot." (worker in hospitality)

The findings show a glaring absence of health and safety delegates or committees (2.0) within workplaces, indicating a lack of structured mechanisms for addressing and improving occupational safety practices. Moreover, a minority of workers receive health and safety training (3.8), suggesting that training efforts are insufficient to adequately prepare workers for the diverse hazards present in this sector. In addition, there is a deficiency in providing protective equipment free of charge to workers (4.4), potentially exposing them to avoidable safety risks. For some workers, the situation is perceived more positively:

"Whenever any working material is needed like detergent, buckets, soap etc., I report to the manager or receptionist and it's provided on time." (worker in hospitality)

Figure 8: **Occupational Safety and Health** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)


0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Occupational safety and health'
6.4
Does your employer provide protective equipment free of charge?
4.4
Does your company or organisation have a health and safety delegate or committee?
2.0
Did you receive health and safety training for the present job?
3.8
Does your main paid job involve working at very high speed and/or working to tight deadlines?
5.8
Does your main paid job involve vibrations of hand tools, and/or tiring positions, and/or carrying or...
7.8
Are you exposed at work to breathing in smoke fumes; powder or dust, and or breathing vapours such as...
8.6
Are you exposed at work to noise so loud that you would have to raise your voice to talk to people;...
8.2
Do you have access to clean water, food, and a toilet at your workplace?
9.3
Do you think your health is at risk because of your work?
7.7

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

The graph shows that workers report limited exposure to hazardous substances and environmental conditions (8.6), and noise and extreme temperatures (8.2), suggesting low occupational health risks, although quite some workers report to have to work at very high speed and/or working to tight deadlines (5.8). Relatively few workers feel that their health is in danger in their workplace (7.7). The study could not assess to what extent workers are knowledgeable about the risks in their workplaces and their rights. Quite some workers do refer to the impact of the long days and the heavy work, which could be an indication of ignorance about their rights regarding occupational health:

"If I had another option of choosing a better job than this I would surely do so because this job gives me backache because of bending everyday while washing and cleaning." (worker in hospitality)

"I work alone, it involves straining, over bending and I always get severe back pain. I am given one day off at least I utilise it to rest " (worker in hospitality)

"..sometimes I fall sick not because of malaria but because the body wants to rest." (worker in hospitality)

4.9 Voice and worker representation

Voice and worker representation score moderate (5.0), with weak points in areas such as having structures representing workers (1.6), and gender committees (1.6). The score for organising

meetings with workers is slightly higher (6.4). Quite a number of workers do not feel free to join a trade union (5.3), and quite some companies do not have a grievance and complaints mechanism in place (6.0). The external inspection of the workplace happens (5.7), but it is not systematic across all the companies.

We observe large differences in how company managers engage with their staff. Some have positive experiences, such as the two examples below, however many workers report problems with the lack of consultation, the absence of worker representation, and challenges with family members of the management (below figure 9).

"The bosses are understanding, and when you talk to them, they listen. This is one of the motivations because elsewhere we hear that the bosses can be tough." (worker in hospitality)

"The manager listens to our concerns, and he is understanding." (worker in hospitality)

Figure 9: **Voice and Representation** (N=95, 0= lowest score, 10=most positive score)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Aggregated score 'Voice and representation'
5.0
Does your company or organisation organise meetings on a regular basis in which employees can express...
6.4
Does your company or organisation have any structures representing employees (trade union,...
1.6
Does your company or organisation have a committee or delegate that considers gender issues?
1.6
Do you feel free to join a worker organisation/trade union of your choice?
5.3
Would your employer discriminate on the basis of membership to worker organisations?
8.7
Does your company have a grievance and complaints mechanism?
6.0
Has your workplace been inspected by any of the following organisations over the last year?...
5.7

Source: Authors own construction based on primary data, 2024

" There is limited team work and sine colleagues tend to discriminate each other and have misunderstandings amongst workers and yet there is no one to listen to such grievances.There is no mechanism in place or procedure." (worker in hospitality)

"The hotel is filled with relatives who are not even qualified for the positions they hold. This has not allowed us to freely express our views, we keep our problems to ourselves." (worker in hospitality)

"Other places they call for meetings to explain situations on delay of salaries and listen to workers' complaints, and yet here we don't have such meetings." (worker in hospitality)

5 Worker proposals for improvements

The workers were also asked to suggest concrete proposals to improve their working situation. Four main themes emerge when taking into account the number of references to a theme.

Salary and benefits (income security) - Many workers emphasized the need for salary increases and timely payments. They also requested additional benefits such as allowances, medical insurance, and paid leave.

Working conditions and safety - Improving working conditions and ensuring safety at the workplace were common concerns. Workers requested better protective gear, safer working environments, and mechanisms to reduce work-related stress.

"Provision of safety equipment and keeping working environment safe and clean." (worker in hospitality)

Training and professional development - Workers expressed a desire for more training opportunities to enhance their skills and job security. They also suggested regular meetings to discuss performance and address complaints.

"Organise regular trainings for workers to gain skills in all sectors." (worker in hospitality)

Work-Life balance and employee well-being - Proposals included requests for better work-life balance through shifts, rest periods, and improved meal options. Workers also highlighted the need for a supportive and respectful work environment.

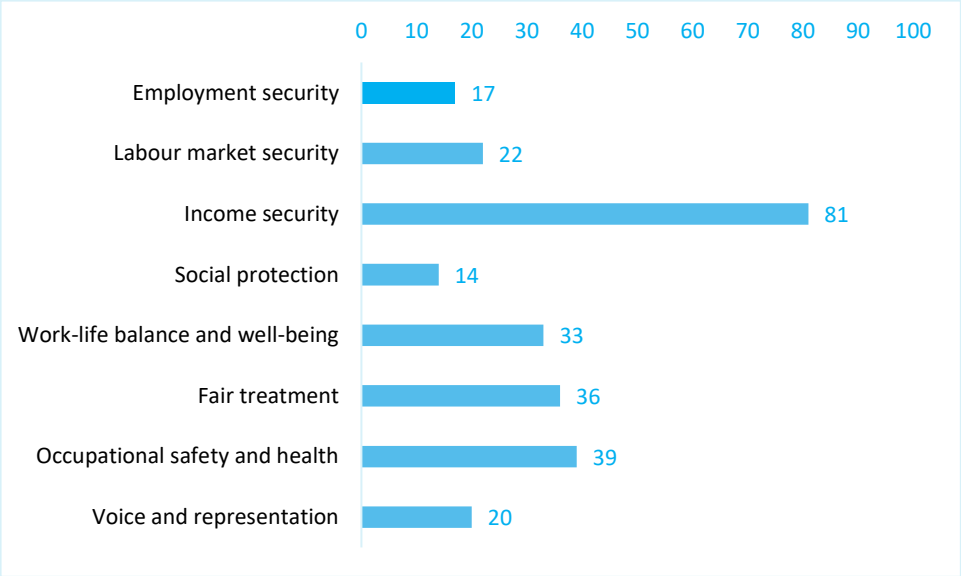
"We work for long hours, we need shifts or day offs." (worker in hospitality)

"Bosses should be more tolerant and not abuse us all the time." (worker in hospitality)

Figure 11 shows the number of proposals clustered according to the eight domains of decent work, confirming again the importance of income security (wage levels), occupational safety and health,

fair treatment, and work-life balance and well-being. An important observation relates to the limited explicit references to social protection, although this is a very weak domain. While follow-up research could look into the reasons for this, an overall ignorance about social protection could be at play, as well as a focus on the most direct needs related to wages and working hours.

Figure 10: **Number of proposals by workers clustered according to eight domains of decent work** (N=95, each worker could make two proposals)



6 Recommendations

6.1 Strengthening social protection systems

Social protection is critical for reducing vulnerabilities, especially for workers in informal sectors. Policies should focus on expanding access to health insurance, pensions, severance pay, paid leave, and other aspects of social protection.

6.2 Formalizing employment arrangements

Lack of formal employment contracts undermines job security and exposes workers to arbitrary dismissal. Policymakers should enforce written contracts across the sector, ensuring that workers and employers have clear terms of engagement. Incentives could encourage employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to transition from informal to formal employment arrangements.

6.3 Promoting gender equality and inclusive workplaces

Gender disparities remain a major issue, with women reporting lower income security, job instability, and higher exposure to workplace harassment. Closing the gender pay gap and improving women's access to decent work opportunities should be prioritised. Policymakers must ensure that maternity and paternity leave are accessible, fostering shared caregiving roles. Furthermore, anti-discrimination laws should be strictly enforced to create safe and supportive workplaces for women.

6.4 Enhancing occupational safety and labour inspections

Occupational safety and health is essential in the hospitality sector, where workers often do long and irregular hours, and could be exposed to repetitive movements, and loud noise. Sector-specific safety guidelines should be developed, and SMEs should receive technical support to implement safety measures. Workers must have personal protective equipment and regular health and safety training. Increasing the frequency of labour inspections and strengthening oversight will ensure compliance with safety standards.

6.5 Promote worker representation through trade unions and workplace councils.

This is essential for strengthening employee voices, improving workplace conditions, and ensuring fair treatment. Governments should strengthen legal frameworks to guarantee workers' rights to organise. At the same time, employers should collaborate with unions to establish sectoral collective bargaining agreements that address wages, job security, and other benefits. Gender-inclusive representation and capacity-building initiatives for union leaders can ensure effective advocacy and negotiation.